

7 Churches Provide Fellowship

Just before a Sunday morning communion service, five persons to be received as church members stood before a pastor and a group of deacons. One new member was a Chinese businessman and another was a girl who worked as a maid in a wealthy home. The others were an old man, a teenage boy, and a factory woman. Impressed by the variety of backgrounds, the pastor remarked, “Today five different people will receive the right hand of fellowship, becoming members of this church. Though not alike in race, position, or age, through salvation in Christ each has been brought into one fellowship. As the apostle said, there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus. Today you see proof of this!”

God has designed fellowship that we may be a help, strength, and joy to each other. This is one of the important functions of the local church.

The Plan

- A. Fellowship in the Local Church
- B. Fellowship Between Churches

The Goals

1. Explain the importance of fellowship in the local church.
2. Identify various forms of fellowship activities.

A. FELLOWSHIP IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

Goal 1. Explain the importance of fellowship in the local church.

Reasons for Fellowship

Something wonderful happened. During a week of special meetings both Timothy and Mary received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. It made them want to share the good news with everyone. Mary's parents, who showed no interest in the gospel before, were impressed by the change in Mary. While not yet ready to visit the church, they did accept an invitation to a church picnic at the park.

There was plenty of food and games. The people seemed to really care about each other, and they warmly included Mary's parents in all the activities. Mary's younger brother especially enjoyed the races. When he heard the others talk about what they did in Sunday School, he decided he wanted to go too.

Mary's family began to attend meetings and soon all three were converted. Christian fellowship first attracted them to the church and eventually led to their hearing and responding to the message of salvation.

The early church provided for this basic need for fellowship. After Peter's preaching on the Day of Pentecost, many believed and were baptized. About 3,000 people were added to the church that day. They "devoted themselves to the apostles'

teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42).

We have drawn the following guidelines from the example left us by the early church:

1. *Believers took time to learn from the apostles.* With the large numbers being saved, each one could hardly have had private instruction. Perhaps they were in classes comparable to our church school. As we study God’s Word together, we not only learn, but also develop closeness as we share the beautiful truths of our heavenly Father.

2. *Believers all took part in the fellowship.* In today’s world people still need the fellowship of a local church. Listening to gospel broadcasts or watching church services on television does not substitute for being part of a local body.

It can be especially difficult for young converts to live the Christian life by themselves. They need the strength and the experience of mature believers, and seasoned Christians need the zeal and enthusiasm of new Christians. By meeting the entire church is strengthened.

3. *They shared meals together.* Eating is an essential part of life, and eating together is a vital kind of fellowship. Inviting a person to eat with you is a sign of friendship. Fellowship meals play an important part in church life.

4. *The early church emphasized praying together.* Prayer gatherings in a church building or in homes strengthen spiritual fellowship. As believers worship the Lord and pray for each other, they grow together in grace and love.

5. *They shared needs together.* Members of the early church were considerate of each other. They helped widows and the poor (Acts 2:44; 4:32; 6:1; 9:36). Because of this sharing, Paul was able to write to the young church at Philippi, “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion” (Philippians 2:1). This is how it should be done in the churches today.

Application

1 If a local church meets only for teaching and prayer, what three activities are lacking?

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Structures for Fellowship

We have seen how doing things together is a vital part of our Christian life. We shall now look at some of the organizations within the church that help meet our need for fellowship.

Christian women often form their own groups for fellowship and outreach in prayer, work, and giving. Their concerns are for the church, missionaries, and local needs. They work together on projects such as sewing for needy families, decorating Sunday School rooms, or visiting shut-ins. Their giving may seem small, but it is surprising what big things they accomplish! They find real joy in this fellowship of helping.

Men also organize into groups and meet for prayer. They raise funds for missionary projects, or perhaps for Christian literature. In some places they help to build their own or another church building. Not least in their activities is that of reaching other men for Christ.

Children are encouraged to engage in programs designed especially for them. Capable, consecrated adults teach them various skills: cooking, sewing, handwork, camping, woodwork, and survival skills. These fun times help them stay interested in church. Both boys' and girls' groups are trained in Christian principles. They memorize Scripture and are given goals to strive toward. Guided while young and responsive, they are more likely to grow into well-rounded adults who love and serve the Lord.

Youth also need activities suited to them. Given worthwhile goals, they can do much for the church and its outreach. They have their own services with leaders from within their group, under the direction of the pastor. Some larger churches have a youth pastor in addition to the regular pastor. Young people should be provided with interesting activities and teaching to counteract the attractions and temptations of a sinful world.

The church can meet the needs of elderly people. One of the greatest problems of older people in many societies today is that of loneliness—they feel forgotten. Churches reaching these people in retirement homes or private residences not only help to fill their empty hours, but serve as a reminder that God cares.

These organizations and others within the church provide needed fellowship. There can also be get-togethers for special occasions and holidays. A picnic is a common favorite. Some churches have a fellowship hall, a place with tables, chairs, and a kitchen unit, where all kinds of gatherings can take place.

Perhaps you can think of other ways that people can have fellowship. Sometimes fellowship takes place without previous planning as the Lord lets us meet other believers in unexpected ways. Although the main purpose of the church is to worship, fellowship contributes to the well-being of a balanced church. Worship is lifting our hands to God. Fellowship is holding our hands out to each other.

Application

- 2** Circle the letter in front of each true statement.
- a)** The early church spent all its free time in study and in prayer.
 - b)** Children can have fun and learn in church-related activities.
 - c)** Young people should be provided with interesting activities to counteract the temptations of the world.
 - d)** Fellowship with believers helps produce a well-balanced Christian life.

- 3** From the list below, select the key word to having fellowship.
- a)** Study
 - b)** Organization
 - c)** Picnic
 - d)** Togetherness
 - e)** Needs
- 4** Which activities or organizations in the church appeals most to you?

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If you are not already involved in some form of fellowship with other believers, look for a way to get involved. If your church is lacking in opportunities for fellowship, ask others to work together with you to get it going.

B. FELLOWSHIP BETWEEN CHURCHES

Goal 2. Identify various forms of fellowship activities.

Taking part in fellowship between churches is a stimulating experience. It broadens our outlook and helps each church realize it is part of a much greater whole—the body of Christ. Wider ranges of friends are formed as we associate with other churches.

Fellowship meetings. In some areas fellowship meetings are held once a month. Churches take turns being the host to other churches. Preaching of the Word, testimonies of answered prayer, perhaps a meal together in between services, and special singing and music are features of a fellowship meeting.

Rallies. These are usually get-togethers of the various groups with similar groups from other churches. Young people enjoy youth rallies conducted by their youth leaders. Women

respond to women's rallies and men like to attend men's conventions.

Contests. Memory work competition, or Bible Quiz competition between churches, encourage the study of God's Word. Musical competition is also a means of attracting people to the church.

Camps and Retreats. Church members over a wide area get away from their everyday work schedules to attend camps or retreats. As they take time out for spiritual things they are refreshed and edified. Many people have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit at a camp or retreat.

United Evangelistic Outreach. Churches near each other can work together in a joint outreach. Special speakers or musical groups may be invited to minister. Such meetings make a strong impact on the community. Follow-up work should be organized so new converts will find fellowship in a church near them. Local churches need to look beyond their own walls to the ripening harvest field of souls. Working in cooperation with other churches reinforces that the body of Christ includes all believers.

Churches need each other in fellowship just as individual believers do. Today we are seeing a coming together among born-again and Spirit-filled people. The large interchurch gatherings show the world that the love of Christ and the fellowship in the Spirit are stronger than denominational lines. Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).


Although some churches prefer being independent, most of them belong to a denomination. Midway between these two is a "cooperative fellowship," to which many Pentecostal churches belong. Though in a cooperative fellowship, each local group governs and supports itself, those involved in such a movement are banded together to work for God. Through cooperation greater ministries can be carried out, such as printing gospel literature, producing radio programs, sending out missionaries, and conducting large conventions or evangelistic crusades.

Application

5 Before each example, write the number of the phrase that applies:

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| ... a | To help young people meet other youth | 1) Fellowship |
| ... b | To spend time in prayer and relaxation along with other believers | 2) Rally |
| ... c | To stimulate interest in God's Word | 3) Contest |
| ... d | To have fellowship with other churches | 4) Camp or retreat |
| ... e | To work with other churches in evangelistic outreach | 5) United evangelistic outreach |

6 Circle the letter in front of each correct sentence. Fellowship between churches strengthens

- a)** our fellowship as individuals.
 - b)** the local church.
 - c)** missionary outreach.
 - d)** our witness to unbelievers.
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Check Your Answers

- 1 Fellowship, sharing of meals, and sharing of needs.
- 4 Your answer.
- 2 Statements **b)**, **c)**, and **d)** are true.
- 5 **a** 2) Rally
b 4) Camp or retreat
c 3) Contest
d 1) Fellowship meeting
e 5) United evangelistic outreach
- 3 **d)** togetherness
- 6 You should have circled all of them.

